



August 14, 2023

Write On, St. Andrews!

What writers we are at St. Andrews! How pleased Bob McQuilkin must have been to see that so many new volunteers are willing to write these “Faith Matters.” All of you know that he had a passionate interest in creative writing. When Frank and I joined the church, many of our first conversations with Bob were about writing. I don’t know what Bob’s last written word was, but I know that he was a serious writer throughout his life, and he always encouraged others to write. All of you are writers! You write those Session and committee reports, new member profiles, appeals and announcements to share during a church service, and certainly thousands of cards or notes of congratulation, condolence, celebration, and concern.

Not everything you write is for or about the church, of course; you write letters to the editor, long letters (*maybe handwritten!*) to family and friends, email letters of complaint or inquiry, texts to the kids and grandkids, thoughtful responses on social media, even recipes. Some of you do also write poems, short stories, novels, articles, memoirs... I would love to know about the huge categories that I’m missing. What are you writing?

And then there’s the writing you do or did for your job. As a teacher/administrator, I did some writing: lesson plans, letters of recommendation, lengthy responses to student essays, individual paragraph comments for grade cards. I wrote speeches, course descriptions, committee reports, emails to students, parents, faculty, and administration. Don’t tell my husband, but one semester I even wrote a literary analysis every time I assigned an essay to students; I chose one of the topics I had suggested for them and wrote my own essay.

You’d probably love to hear more about my Curriculum Committee Minutes from 1988, but I wonder if you’ve ever considered how much writing Rev. Anne and our other pastors, retired pastors, and semi-retired pastors have done

throughout their careers. Many, but certainly not all, of the examples are evident to you. If you consider only the sermons, the number is huge. I can't begin to know how many, but a fictional example comes to mind. Rev. John Ames, the narrator of Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* (2004), is in failing health and writing letters to his young son, who won't have his father for most of his life. Rev. Ames has totaled the approximate number of his own sermons: "Say, fifty sermons a year for forty-five years, not counting funerals and so on, of which there have been a great many. Two thousand two hundred and fifty. If they average thirty pages, that's sixty-seven thousand five hundred pages... Then I've written two hundred twenty-five books, which puts me up there with Augustine and Calvin for quantity" (19). Notice the words *for quantity*. Rev. Ames does not think much of the quality of his sermons and writes that sometimes he knew, even as he gave the sermons, that they should have been better. His young wife is interested in getting the boxes down from the attic, and he wonders if he should try to sort through some of the sermons, so as to "leave a better impression." Self-effacing and highly critical of his own writing, he nevertheless highly values the act of writing, which he says always "felt like praying, even when I wasn't writing prayers, as I was often enough. You feel that you are with someone" (19).

Maybe you suspected that a book report was coming, and probably many of you know Robinson's *Gilead* series, which includes also *Home* (2008), *Lila* (2014), and *Jack* (2020). I don't often reread books that I'm not teaching, but Robinson's novels are the outstanding exceptions. They're beautiful, and they speak powerfully to issues of faith. Yes, I hope you read these books if you haven't done so already, but mainly I want to encourage you to keep writing and to share your writing. Like many writers, you might lack confidence in your writing, but don't stash it in boxes in the attic, or hide it under a bushel, or delete it from your hard drive! Don't assume that AI will make your writing irrelevant or unnecessary. Keep that journal! Write prayers, or write whatever, for you, approaches the feeling of prayer, the feeling of being with someone. God's work can be done by means of our writing, in addition to everything else we do as Christians, citizens, and community members, in connection with this church and throughout our lives.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Gilead*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004.

~Written by Maurine Slaughter

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